

Last week, the American people sent a loud message to Washington: Congress needs to be reformed and get back to the business of representing the people. The American people are tired of Congress continually expanding the cost and scope of the government. The American people are tired of Congress passing destructive bills that are thousands of pages long and that no one has even read. The American people are tired of Congress and the Administration putting special interests ahead of the common good, whether by exempting unions from new laws or by bailing out corporate failures.

We have clearly seen that the American people want change in Washington. As House Republicans, that change has to begin with how we do business in the House of Representatives. Congress has clearly contributed to the problems in Washington, and real change will require more than simply changing the party in power — it will require reforming Congress.

As John Boehner mentioned in a recent speech on Congressional reform, this is not a partisan problem. Both parties have made backroom deals, paid lip-service to rules they ignored, squelched debate and overspent your money. In just the last year, the national debt passed \$13 trillion and major legislation was passed before members of Congress had time to read it.

The current abuses and overreaches by Congress have exposed an obvious problem: Washington is broken. Government has become increasingly greedy — and so Congress plays the games of power politics: voting itself more spending money and more control of your daily life. In this game, Washington makes the rules and, far too often, Washington makes itself the exception to the rules.

It's time for those rules to change. When the new Congress convenes in January, we must focus our efforts on two big goals: reigning in the dramatic growth in the size, scope and cost of the federal government, and making the House responsive to the American people once again. Here are a few ideas on how we can work toward these goals.

Start the discussion now — When Congress reconvenes for the lame duck session later this month, Republicans should immediately form a temporary committee or a similar structure on Congressional Reform. This group should quickly start gathering ideas for how we can limit the growth of government and restore the People's House.

Budgeting Process — As Mr. Boehner mentioned in his speech, Congress' budgeting process is broken. The House did not pass a budget this year for the first time since 1974, but even if we had, what good is a budget if it fuels our skyrocketing federal debt? As every American family knows, a budget is about setting priorities, making hard choices and living within your means. The federal budget does none of these things. We should require the House to consider a balanced budget, no matter how painful, and vote yes or no, before considering a budget with a deficit. We should make it harder for Congress to pass credit limit increases by requiring a three-fifths or two-thirds majority. As Congressman Blunt suggested, if a government program is created, our rules should require that Congress also make a corresponding reduction in spending — in the same bill. This CutGo concept, along with the disentanglement of appropriations bills, will also enhance the ability of the House to get serious about our spending problem.

Rational Scheduling — Currently, members of Congress are often scheduled to be in multiple committee hearings and debate on the House floor at once. They can't be in more than one place at the same time but their conflicting schedules mean they must choose one responsibility over others. Rep. Rob Bishop has proposed that the House create regular times for these tasks to allow members to meaningfully engage in committee work and debate on the House floor.

Committee Jurisdiction — The current committee structure promotes overspending. Spending decisions are concentrated in the hands of just a few senior politicians. They protect their seniority and status by ensuring that lots of taxpayer money gets spread around to influential Washington interest groups. This institutional obstacle to reform ensures that very different programs — like food stamps and farm aid — are bundled together and get a majority of votes on the House floor. Instead, the responsibility for spending decisions needs to be spread across committees, with checks and balances to ensure that unrelated measures are voted on separately. And while it may be a blasphemous question in Washington, why does the House need two committees — one legislating and one appropriating, to oversee every department of the government? Why not combine these functions to streamline oversight and create a more coherent committee structure?

Transparency — In the recent past, “dark-of-night” legislative activity has become routine in the House. The *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* was passed without a single full copy of the bill being available anywhere to be read by members of Congress, congressional staff or the public. While selected committees occasionally need to do business behind closed doors for national security online before they consider it, and any votes in committee should be promptly posted online as well. Committees should also be required to

provide easily readable versions of the bill they are considering. All too often, members of Congress as well as the American people have no idea of the significance of the bill or amendment they are considering. This is unacceptable. reasons, most committee activity should be fully public. Yet, it isn't. Instead of obscuring its work, Congress should open it up to public scrutiny. All bills and conference reports should be posted online and publicly available at least 72 hours prior to consideration on the floor. Rep. Bono Mack has wisely proposed that all committee markups be webcast, so that every American with internet access can keep an eye on what Congress is doing. Committees should be required to post proposed legislation

Decentralizing Power — While the House currently has over twenty committees, the vast majority of its legislative power is held by less than a quarter of those committees. These powerful committees create bills and send them to the floor of the House, where very few rank-and-file members are allowed to offer debate. Instead of allowing ideas and proposals from all sides to be considered and evaluated on their merits, debate is often limited to a handful of highly partisan amendments. Even on very important matters, debate has been squelched or excessively limited. Instead, opportunities for all members of Congress to debate and offer relevant amendments should be increased. In addition, legislative power should be more evenly distributed between committees and irrelevant committees should be disbanded.

The founders believed the House of Representatives would be the People's House; filled with elected representatives who were close to their communities and understood their interests. It's time for structural reforms that restore that vision.

James Madison famously argued: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."

Madison said that it was necessary to set up a system where government was obliged to control itself. That's why Congress is divided into the House and the Senate and why we have three branches of government. Yet he was skeptical that these "checks and balances" would be enough and suggested that "further precautions" might be necessary to control government.

I believe that the 112th Congress must learn from Madison's wisdom and change the way the House does business. Further precautions are necessary to protect America from too much power concentrated in too few people.

Making the changes Americans demand will not be easy. The majority party is going to have to decentralize power, increase transparency, restructure committees and tackle the budget deficit. In the short-run, these adjustments may be difficult for the majority party, but they will be right for America.

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